

# CONSUMER ALERT

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Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection



## Be Scam Savvy When Using Online Classified Sites

**Release Date:** October 1, 2013

**Contact:** Jerad Albracht, 608-224-5007

**Jim Dick, Communications Director, 608-224-5020**

MADISON –While thousands of successful transactions occur every day by way of online classified ads, the open, anonymous nature of websites like Craigslist attracts an unending stream of scammers. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's (DATCP) Consumer Information Hotline regularly hears from Wisconsin residents targeted in ad scams, and often there are common themes to the scenarios. DATCP advises users of classified ad websites to be prepared to recognize common scam red flags found both in listings and in communications with buyers and sellers.

To best protect yourself from scammers, keep these simple tips in mind when using an online ad site:

- Keep your deals local and meet personally with the buyer or seller at a populated public location like a cafe (Craigslist suggests that following this tip will help you avoid "99% of scam attempts").
- If something seems too good to be true, it probably is. For example, a cut-rate price for a rental home may be an indication that you are reading a fake listing. Scammers create these listings with images and information from real estate postings.
- Never wire money to someone you don't know – especially overseas.
- If a buyer offers to send you a check for more than the purchase price for your item but wants you to wire him a portion of the extra funds, it's a scam. The check or money order he sends you is bad. When the bank realizes that it cashed a fake check or money order, you will be responsible for the total amount cashed plus any associated fees.
- Be leery of any job posting that requires you to pay upfront for startup materials.
- Always keep your personal and financial details private.
- Remember that Craigslist is not involved in any transactions other than hosting the original advertisement. The company does not handle payments, provide escrow accounts or offer any buyer or seller protection plans. If you are being told otherwise, it is a scam.
- If you believe that you are about to be scammed in a transaction, stop pursuing the deal and halt communications with the other party immediately. Contact local police or the Wisconsin Consumer Information Hotline at 800-422-7128 for more assistance.

Craigslist users can find a list of scam red flags and tips on the site's "safety" page, located at <http://www.craigslist.org/about/scams> (this link is also posted at the bottom of any page on the Craigslist site). Some helpful topics on that page include common-sense rules for safe transactions; federal contacts for reporting scams; ways to recognize scams; and examples of emails received by Craigslist users from potential scammers.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at [datcp.wisconsin.gov](http://datcp.wisconsin.gov), call the Consumer Information Hotline or send an e-mail to [datcphotline@wisconsin.gov](mailto:datcphotline@wisconsin.gov).

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